

**DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL**

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**NEW LAWS WILL AFFECT CALIFORNIA DRIVERS**

Several new laws taking effect Jan. 1, 1998 will have substantial impact on California drivers, according to the California Highway Patrol. The most significant laws include:

AB 1297 (Morrow) -- Increases the number of times red lights will be activated on school buses, and, as a result, the number of stops motorists must make. The bill continues existing law which requires motorists driving in both directions to stop when a school bus' red lights are flashing. The new law, however, provides that school bus drivers must turn on the flashing red lights more often -- each time a child enters or exits the bus. Currently, lights are activated only when the child is crossing the road. School districts, following consultation with the CHP, have the option to make exemptions at various school bus stops to the increased use of flashing red lights.

AB 130 (Battin) -- Allows prosecutors the option of charging a drunken driving suspect with either a felony or a misdemeanor if the driver has been convicted of a prior drunken driving felony during the last 10 years. Current law allows the option if the suspect has had three prior drunken driving convictions in seven years. The bill targets the serious repeat offender.

AB 1561 (Omnibus Transportation Bill) -- Prohibits motorists from parking in the cross-hatched areas adjacent to handicapped parking spaces. The disabled need the cross-hatched areas to use wheelchairs and other devices. The prohibition on parking in crosshatched areas formerly was in effect only in parking garages and parking lots, but now will be observed at any area of pavement.

AB 1561(Omnibus Transportation Bill) -- Shortens from 45 minutes to 20 minutes the time an unattended car alarm or horn is activated before the vehicle can be towed away. The legislation also allows a salaried law enforcement employee such as a parking enforcement person to remove the vehicle. Formerly, only a peace officer could take such action.

SB 396(Kelly) -- Is aimed at cutting the non-emergency calls received by overwhelmed CHP dispatchers from motorists calling from freeway call boxes. It allows the local authorities administering the freeway call boxes to contract with either the CHP or a private agency to handle calls on specific highways and county roads. The state's call box system currently is composed of 15,000 roadside boxes in 26 of the 58 counties. The local authorities were established by legislation in 1986, primarily to provide aid to motorists with disabled vehicles. The CHP was given responsibility to answer calls and provide central dispatching. The system now generates over 100,000 calls a month, or 1.3 million calls a year. At the same time, CHP dispatchers are handling a huge upsurge in the number of emergency cellular 9-1-1 calls. SB 396 provides a way to redirect the non-emergency calls to a private agency.

Other bills:

AB 1238 -- Requires school bus driver fingerprint forms to be processed and returned to the originating CHP office not later than 15 working days after being received by the Department of Justice.

AB 379 -- Authorizes the CHP to enter into contracts to inspect vehicles transporting migrant workers in order to issue inspection stickers and verify compliance with federal standards.

AB 379 -- Authorizes the CHP commissioner to contract with Santa Clara County cities or the county for traffic enforcement.

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